

10-24-1975

# Italian Women and Girls: Interview with Adele Petrarca by Carmela Santoro

Adele Petrarca

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COVER SHEET FOR INTERVIEWS

NAME OF INTERVIEWEE Adele Petrarca

INTERVIEWER \_\_\_\_\_

DATE OF INTERVIEW October 24, 1975

SUBJECTS COVERED

Description of life in Italy, family

Impressions on arrival in America

Schooling in U.S.

Recreation

Comparison of life in U.S. and in Italy

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Adele Petraca

October 24, 1975

Hopkins School

Q: Tell us about where you were born.

A: I was born in a little town near Naples, Fornelli. It was very small.

Q: Did you go to school there?

A: I went up to 2nd grade. The teachers were stricter there. You worked more there. We did a lot of math. When I came here and they put me in third grade, they were just starting to do the things in math that we had done in first grade.

Q: Were you surprised?

A: A little.

Q: Tell me about your family there.

A: My father was from a big family. There were nine of us. We lived on a farm. My father had to go to work in Switzerland. He came home on holidays. The farm wasn't enough.

Q: Did the children help?

A: Yes. There are five children. One was born here. We lived with the grandparents. My grandmother helped with the children. My grandfather worked on the farm.

Q: Do you remember where in Switzerland?

A: No. A lot from my place worked in Switzerland.

Q: How old were you when you came here?

A: 8.

Q: Do you remember why you came?

A: My father didn't want to stay away from the family. We were



either going to go to Switzerland or come here. We decided to come here.

Q: Were there any people that your family knew here?

A: My grandfather had been to the U.S. and influenced us.

Q: The whole family came here?

A: The grandparents came a year later. We had an uncle here.

Q: Where did you land?

A: In Boston, by plane.

Q: What were your first impressions?

A: I had come from a small town and everything looked so big. The houses were separate here and had yards.

Q: Was there a house for you here?

A: My uncle found us a little one to stay in. After my parents went to work we bought a house.

Q: What does your father do here?

A: He and my uncle work with type.

Q: Does your mother work?

A: She works at an optical place.

I take care of my brother and sister while she works at night.

Q: Where the boys and girls separate in schools at Italy?

A: No, but we had uniforms. The girls wore a pink bow and the boys blue to tell the difference. If the boys had shorts on they looked like girls.

Q: What did you do for fun there?

A: We made up games. We didn't have many toys. We didn't have many stores.

Q: Did you find anything difficult when you came here?

A: You read words differently here.



Q: How did you learn English?

A: At school. I started 2nd grade and by the time I was in 3rd I started understanding more.

Q: Did you start school right away when you came here?

A: I missed about five days. It was September when we came here. I was supposed to be going into third, but they said it would be better to go into second. I went to V<sub>1</sub>ssi.

Q: Did the children treat you differently?

A: Everyone was friendly. They tried to help me with things.

Q: How about the teachers?

A: The first day I went a teacher thought I could read and gave me a book and told me to start reading and I couldn't tell her that I couldn't read.

Q: How do you like school?

A: I like it.

Q: Do you have any plans for your future?

A: I don't know what I want to be or anything.

Q: Are you a good student?

A: Yes.

Q: Do you think you would like to continue in school or work?

A: School. I would like to be a gym teacher.

Q: Do you belong to any clubs?

A: I'm on the gymnastic team and want to be on the volley ball team.

Q: Do you belong to the girls club?

A: I was going to but my mother started working.

Q: What do you do here for fun?



A: I go home and heat up supper for my mother while she is working.

Q: Do you go to the movies?

A: On Sundays we go to Italian movies.

Q: Do you go to dances?

A: My sister does. She's older.

Q: Your brother goes to R.I.C.?

A: Yes.

Q: What does your sister do?

A: She works and goes to hairdressing school at night.

Q: Do you speak Italian at home?

A: Yes.

Q: Is it a dialect?

A: Yes. That is why I take Italian here. My mother wants me to keep up with the language. She wants me to write to my friends in Italy so I won't forget how to write. My friends are taking English so she writes to me in English and I write to her in Italian.

Q: Do you find any differences in the way you live?

A: We go to the store for a lot more things here. We have some land where we grow some things in the back of the house. The cars are much bigger. Not much around. We have three cars here.

Q: Did you ever go to the big cities in Italy?

A: Once a month.

Q: Did you ever go to the beach?

A: Not much there.

Q: Have you ever gone here?



A: Yes, I like it.

Q: What were your first impressions of the U.S.?

Did you have any ideas?

A: I thought it would be better than Italy.

Q: Are there any disappointments?

A: No, not really. The only thing is that over there I could just leave my brother and sister in front of the house and here you have to be scared of everything. The cars, kidnapping.

Q: You've always been in Providence?

A: Yes.

Q: Do you plan on staying?

A: Yes. My mother went back for a visit with the two younger ones two years ago. My brother went last year. My sister is going next year and I'm going the year after. To visit the family.

Q: How did things look to your mother when she went back?

A: She said the houses looked like they would collapse on her. The streets are so small. She got use to all the space. My brother didn't like it. It was difficult to get use to for him. The houses aren't on the farm like here. The animals were close by to us. But now I don't think you can have them anymore.

Q: Are you looking forward to going?

A: I want to see my friends.

Q: Are you interested in politics?

A: No.

Q: What are your favorite subjects?

A: Math and Italian. I don't like social studies. I like gym.

Q: Are you a citizen?

A: My mother is and my sister just became one.



I will get mine soon. My father and brother are not citizens.

Q: Do you see yourself as Italian or American?

A: I feel Italian. I'm not really sure if I want to be a citizen.

Q: What does it mean to be Italian?

A: I just like being Italian.

Q: What does it mean to be American?

A: I don't know that either.

Q: Do you know of anything that an Italian has done for the world?

A: Columbus. Vespucci.

Q: If you could make the choice to come here would you?

A: You can only farm where we were from. If I were from Rome I would stay there.

Q: Do you think you've changed?

A: I don't know. I have a lot of clothes here.

Q: You go to Giulianos every Wednesdays. How do they do that?

A: It use to be to do with having good marks, but now you have to be 14 and have insurance. I took a test at Classical and might go there.

Q: Is there anything else you want to say about here?

A: The kids over here answer the teacher back. We couldn't do that. The teacher is trying to teach and the kids holler back.